

Trends in the reading performance of 9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds

Reading ability is essential to students' educational progress. Since the early 1970s, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has assessed the trends in students' reading performance. These trends provide a picture of how student performance in reading has changed over time, specifically among students of different ages and racial-ethnic groups.

- For 9- and 13-year-olds, average reading scores improved slightly between 1971 and 1980 and showed little or no change between 1980 and 1996. Scores for 17-year-olds have remained relatively consistent since 1971.
- Females outscored males in reading performance across all age groups.
- During these periods, reading scores of black and Hispanic students were lower than those of white students for all age groups. However, the black-white score gap, in particular, changed over time. For all age groups, the gap decreased between 1971 and 1988, yet showed no significant change between 1988 and 1996 for 9- and 17-year-olds and increased for 13-year-olds.

Average reading performance (scale score), by sex and age: 1971–96

Year	Total			Male			Female		
	Age 9	Age 13	Age 17	Age 9	Age 13	Age 17	Age 9	Age 13	Age 17
1971	208	255	285	201	250	279	214	261	291
1975	210	256	286	204	250	280	216	262	291
1980	215	259	286	210	254	282	220	263	289
1984	211	257	289	208	253	284	214	262	294
1988	212	258	290	208	252	286	216	263	294
1990	209	257	290	204	251	284	215	263	297
1992	211	260	290	206	254	284	215	265	296
1994	211	258	288	207	251	282	215	266	295
1996	212	259	287	207	253	280	218	265	294

Average reading performance (scale score), by race-ethnicity and age: 1971–96

Year	White			Black			Hispanic		
	Age 9	Age 13	Age 17	Age 9	Age 13	Age 17	Age 9	Age 13	Age 17
1971	214	261	291	170	222	239	—	—	—
1975	217	262	293	181	226	241	183	232	252
1980	221	264	293	189	233	243	190	237	261
1984	218	263	295	186	236	264	187	240	268
1988	218	261	295	189	243	274	194	240	271
1990	217	262	297	182	242	267	189	238	275
1992	218	266	297	185	238	261	192	239	271
1994	218	265	296	185	234	266	186	235	263
1996	220	267	294	190	236	265	194	240	265

— Not available.

NOTE: The reading performance scale has a range from 0 to 500. See supplemental table 4-1 for detailed explanations of levels. See the supplemental note to *Indicator 5* for a description of the differences between the main NAEP reading assessment, on which *Indicator 5* is

based, and the long-term trend NAEP assessment, on which this indicator is based.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, *NAEP 1996 Trends in Academic Progress*, revised 1998.

Table S4(a) Standard errors for the first text table in *Indicator 4*

Year	Total			Male			Female		
	Age 9	Age 13	Age 17	Age 9	Age 13	Age 17	Age 9	Age 13	Age 17
1971	1.0	0.9	1.2	1.1	1.0	1.2	1.0	0.9	1.3
1975	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.0	0.8	0.9	1.0
1980	1.0	0.9	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.3	1.1	0.9	1.2
1984	0.7	0.5	0.6	1.0	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.7	0.9
1988	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.4	1.3	1.5	1.3	1.0	1.5
1990	1.2	0.8	1.1	1.7	1.1	1.6	1.2	1.1	1.2
1992	0.9	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.7	1.6	0.9	1.2	1.1
1994	1.2	0.9	1.3	1.3	1.2	2.2	1.4	1.2	1.5
1996	1.0	0.9	1.1	1.5	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.2

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, *NAEP 1996 Trends in Academic Progress*, revised 1998.

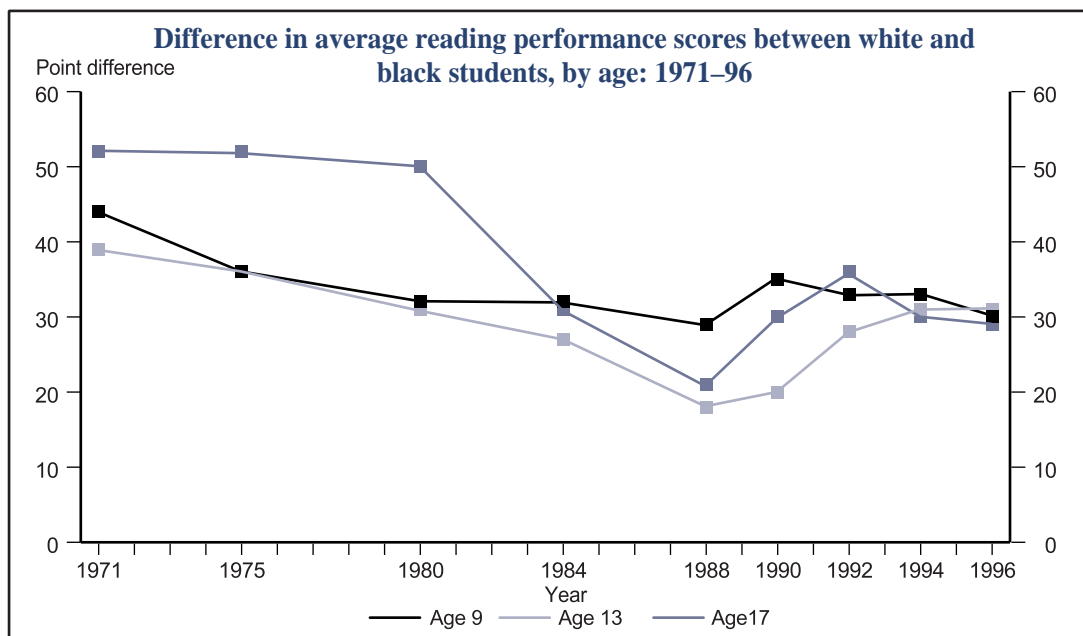
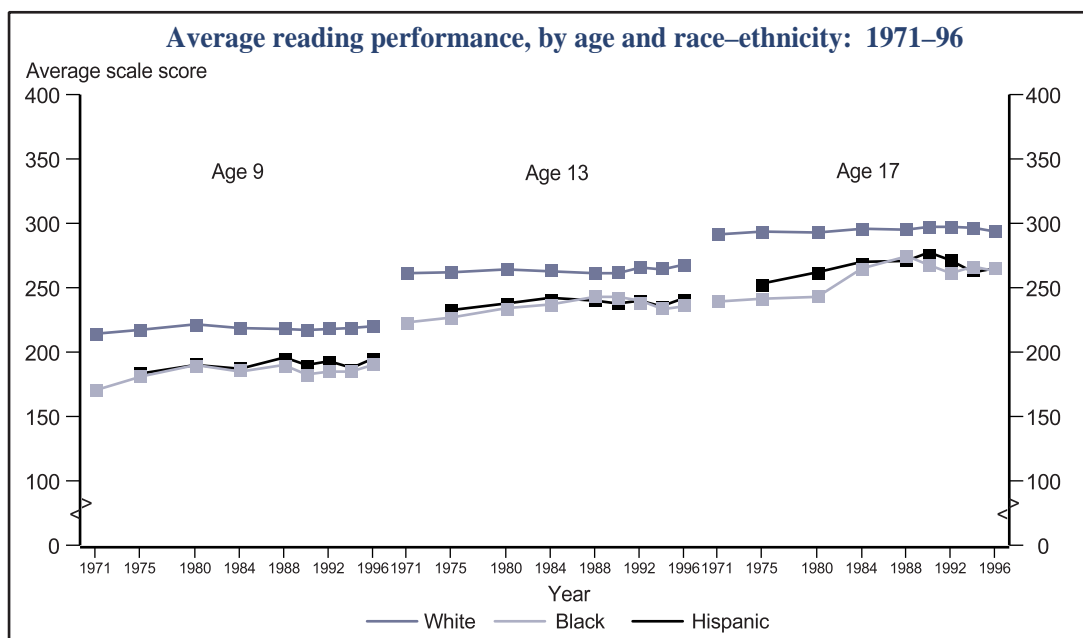
Table S4(b) Standard errors for the second text table in *Indicator 4*

Year	White			Black			Hispanic		
	Age 9	Age 13	Age 17	Age 9	Age 13	Age 17	Age 9	Age 13	Age 17
1971	0.9	0.7	1.0	1.7	1.2	1.7	—	—	—
1975	0.7	0.7	0.6	1.2	1.2	2.0	2.2	3.0	3.6
1980	0.8	0.7	0.9	1.8	1.5	1.8	2.3	2.0	2.7
1984	0.9	0.6	0.9	1.4	1.0	1.0	3.1	1.7	2.9
1988	1.4	1.1	1.2	2.4	2.4	2.4	3.5	3.5	4.3
1990	1.3	0.9	1.2	2.9	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.3	3.6
1992	1.0	1.2	1.4	2.2	2.3	2.1	3.1	3.5	3.7
1994	1.3	1.1	1.5	2.3	2.4	3.9	3.9	1.9	4.9
1996	1.2	1.0	1.2	2.7	2.6	2.7	3.5	2.9	4.1

— Not available.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, *NAEP 1996 Trends in Academic Progress*, revised 1998.

Trends in reading performance



NOTE: The reading performance scale has a range from 0 to 500. See supplemental table 4-1 for detailed explanations of levels. See the supplemental note to *Indicator 5* for a description of the differences between the main NAEP reading assessment, on which *Indicator 5* is based, and the long-term trend NAEP assessment, on which this indicator is based.

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Table 4-1 Levels of reading proficiency**Level 150: Simple, discrete reading tasks**

Readers at this level can follow brief written directions. They can also select words, phrases, or sentences to describe a simple picture and can interpret simple written clues to identify a common object. Performance at this level suggests the ability to carry out simple, discrete reading tasks.

Level 200: Partial skills and understanding

Readers at this level can locate and identify facts from simple informational paragraphs, stories, and news articles. In addition, they can combine ideas and make inferences based on short, uncomplicated passages. Performance at this level suggests the ability to understand specific or sequentially related information.

Level 250: Interrelates ideas and makes generalizations

Readers at this level use intermediate skills and strategies to search for, locate, and organize the information they find in relatively lengthy passages and can recognize paraphrases of what they have read. They can also make inferences and reach generalizations about main ideas and the author's purpose from passages dealing with literature, science, and social studies. Performance at this level suggests the ability to search for specific information, interrelate ideas, and make generalizations.

Level 300: Understands complicated information

Readers at this level can understand complicated literary and informational passages, including material about topics they study at school. They can also analyze and integrate less familiar material and provide reactions to and explanations of the text as a whole. Performance at this level suggests the ability to find, understand, summarize, and explain relatively complicated information.

Level 350: Learns from specialized reading materials

Readers at this level can extend and restructure the ideas presented in specialized and complex texts. Examples include scientific materials, literary essays, and historical documents. Readers are also able to understand the links between ideas, even when those links are not explicitly stated, and to make appropriate generalizations. Performance at this level suggests the ability to synthesize and learn from specialized reading materials.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, *NAEP 1996 Trends in Academic Progress*, revised 1998.